

7

**Testimony in Support of HB 407**  
**Before the House Appropriations Committee**  
**February 2, 2007**

EXHIBIT 9  
DATE 2/2/07  
HB 407

Chairman Sinrud, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 407. My name is Gerald Mueller. I live at 440 Evans in Missoula.

Since February of 2000, I have had the privilege of acting as the facilitator for the Libby Community Advisory Group, known by its acronym CAG. CAG was established by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shortly after it came to Libby to begin the investigation and cleanup of the asbestos contamination. EPA created CAG to provide a regular, formal means of communicating with the people of Libby about the cleanup and issues related to it. From February 2000 through March 2002, CAG met twice a month, and since then it has met almost every month. In the last 7 years, I have traveled to Libby to facilitate CAG meetings some 98 times.

My support for this bill is a result of the knowledge I have gained in my role as the CAG facilitator; however, I testify as an individual. I am not representing CAG or any organization or group.

According to a recent story in the *Washington Post*, when the EPA declared Libby a Superfund site, it called the contamination "the most horrific environmental disaster in this country's history." Through my window as the CAG facilitator, I have watched the Libby community respond as the facts about this disaster came to light. While Libby people are certainly victims of decades of asbestos exposure, they have not acted the typical victim role, passively complaining about their fate. Instead, they have acted to understand and address their situation to make it better. They have sought the best available information about how this disaster has affected their families, their homes, their schools, and their businesses. They are insisting that their community be properly cleaned of asbestos so that no one else need suffer asbestos-related disease. They are seeking support for research into the mechanisms of and treatments for asbestos-related disease. And they are seeking funding to help people who have and will suffer disease pay for the medical, social, and personal services they require.

And the latter is the purpose of HB 407. The people of Libby need help paying their medical bills now. HB 407 provides \$3 million of needed help to Libby people now. In a state with a purported billion dollar surplus, \$3 million is a small price to pay to help alleviate the suffering caused by asbestos-related disease.

While the \$3 million will provide needed help now, the reality, of course, is that this amount will not come close to paying all of the health care bills that are and will continue to come due over the coming decades. Asbestos-related diseases have latency periods of 10 to 40 years. The mine and associated processing facilities shut down in 1990. The EPA cleanup did not begin until 1999. More disease is coming. On their own, the people of Libby and their health care system will not be able to pay for the medical and other care that asbestos-related disease sufferers will require.

Government exists to protect the public health and welfare. No level of government, not federal, not state, and not local protected the people of Libby. In addition to helping meet immediate needs, the three levels of government need work together to assure that a long-term source of funding exists to support the provision of medical services for asbestos-related disease sufferers resulting from the "most horrific environmental disaster in this country's history."

Thank you.